



[Paris, March 18, 1871](#)

The Paris Commune, 1871

The main text (attached) is the third part of Lenin's "Generic Course" on The State and Revolution. It is devoted to the Paris Commune [pictured in the photograph, above, and memorialised in Soviet artwork, below] and to the lessons that Karl Marx in particular drew from that experience.

Marx's work "[The Civil War in France](#)" was written during, and immediately after, the events of early 1871 in Paris. Lenin's summary of Marx, as usual, is brief but misses very little. Lenin's summary itself has its highlights and these are what we will note here.

The first is where Lenin notes that Marx would have made a correction to the [Communist Manifesto](#) of 1848 on the basis of the experience of the Paris Commune. In 1871 Marx wrote: "*...the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery and wield it for its own purposes*"

– by which he meant that proletariat had to *"to smash the bureaucratic-military machine"* and to replace it with a state that is *"the proletariat organized as the ruling class"* and as an *"armed people"* that had disbanded the bourgeoisie's *"special bodies of armed men"*.



Lenin wrote:

"Marx did not indulge in utopias; he expected the experience of the mass movement to provide the reply to the question as to the specific forms this organisation of the proletariat as the ruling class would assume and as to the exact manner in which this organisation would be combined with the most complete, most consistent 'winning of the battle of democracy.'"

The Commune was *"a practical step that was more important than hundreds of programmes and arguments."*

Lenin proceeds in the second and third sections of this chapter to relate how the practical steps were executed.

In the fourth part, Lenin addresses the question of centralism and clearly shows that centralism is not imposed but must be won politically, as a matter of free-willing action. All the time, Lenin is carrying on a secondary argument against the “opportunists” and the “anarchists, whom he says are “twin brothers.” Lenin writes:

“The anarchists dismissed the question of political forms altogether. The opportunists of present-day Social-Democracy accepted the bourgeois political forms of the parliamentary democratic state as the limit which should not be overstepped; they battered their foreheads praying before this 'model', and denounced as anarchism every desire to break these forms.”

“...now one has to engage in excavations, as it were, in order to bring undistorted Marxism to the knowledge of the mass of the people,” says Lenin.

As it was in 1917, so it remains in 2015: One has to engage in excavations.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [State and Revolution, Chapter 3, The Paris Commune, Lenin.](#)
- To download any of the CU courses in PDF files [please click here.](#)